It will take me a day or two to read my mail, discover your message, and set the flags to let you into the hidden areas of the RT. What's more, I can't do it until after you have entered the Game Design RT once. There is a way to know when you are "in": try the command "SET 5". This command will attempt to move you into category 5, one of the hidden categories. If you are in, then it will comply; otherwise, it will blithely lie to you that there is no such category. Once you are in, you can use either the SET command or the BROwse command to read through the hidden categories. Be warned, though, that the CATegories command will still not list the hidden categories.

Guidelines

Lastly, some suggestions for gentlepersonly (gag!) behavior. We are guests on GEnie and I would like to make our presence a positive contribution to GEnie, not a liability. The public are of the Game Design RT has been set up to provide regular (read: paying) customers of GEnie with useful information. Please, take the time to contribute to the ongoing discussions there.

While you are in the public areas, please don't give away the fact that there are private hidden areas that are not accessible to the general public. It only upsets people to know that they are Unchosen. Moreover, I don't want to show my gratitude for GEnie's generosity by telling its customers that they can reduce their GEnie spending by subscribing to the Journal. So let's just keep the existence of the hidden areas our own little secret, OK?

Please take advantage of the other Round Tables on GEnie. There are a lot of them, covering a great deal of material, and I am sure that you will find some of them interesting and useful. You will have to pay for the time you spend in these RTs, but you will undoubtedly find some that are well worth the money.

As always with any telecommunications system, you must be very careful to avoid the problem of misunderstood communications. Remember, the fine nuances of voice intonation and facial expression are lost in the pure ASCII world. Offhand witticisms offered in jest can read like viscious snarls; terse rebuttals can come across as cold anger. It's very easy for well-intentioned people to end up at each other's throats.

To prevent this, always word your messages in as conciliatory and professional a tone as possible. Be wary of sloppy language. If you crack a joke, terminate it with the three characters semicolon - hyphen - close paren. ;-) They represent a sideways smiling face and say, "That's a joke, friend!" I guarantee, if you don't clearly mark it as a joke, somebody will take offense. (e.g., "Oh, yeah? Well, for your information, buster, I happen to raise chickens for a living, and I can assure you that I never allow my chickens loose near roads, and so they don't cross them!")

The problem is trickiest when you find yourself in the thick of a hot debate. Most people have difficulty maintaining strict standards of professional expression on bulletin boards. When that bastard on the other side of the wire lets fly with a particularly pointed broadside, it's hard to keep your cool. All too often you shoot back a furious reply laced with juicy insinuations and clever put-downs. This is called *flaming*. Don't do it — flames, like forest fires, seldom just burn out. They grow on you. Pretty soon the whole board is one raging conflagration.

We don't want to stifle honest intellectual debate. Our profession is still young and uncertain; there is much room for major differences of opinion between intelligent people. We want those differences of opinion to get a full airing. We need a demolition derby of ideas, a barroom brawl of opinions. Please, get in there and fight eloquently for your beliefs — but keep it on an intellectual plane, not a personal one.

I urge you to join the Game Design RT on GEnie and participate in the discussions there. Our experience with the JCGD BBS showed that the community of users benefited greatly from the discussions there. Our hope is that a much larger community will be able to crystallize on GEnie. I hope to see you there! ✿